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# Teachers' Perceptions: Transitioning from Teacher-Selected Reading Materials to Implementing a Core Reading Program

Dana Reisboard, Ph.D. and Annemarie B. Jay, Ph.D.

**Abstract**— This article presents the results of a study that examined teachers' implementation of a new basal reading program in six schools in an affluent northeastern school district. The purpose of this study was to determine teachers' perceptions of the helpfulness of a basal reading program manual, their attitudes toward basal readers as a reading method, and to systematically examine teachers' actual use of these materials. This mixed method descriptive study employed qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. Findings reveal that teachers hold favorable perceptions regarding the core reading program. Concomitantly these teachers have concerns about completing all aspects of the program as well as not having adequate instructional and reading materials for advanced readers.

The effective teaching of reading in elementary schools requires both an effective teacher and adequate and appropriate reading materials and resources for students. Research on the teaching of reading emphasizes the explicit teaching of essential strategies and ensuring that quality instruction includes purposeful reading and writing across disciplines (Cunningham & Allington, 2007; Pressley, 2000). Today's research on reading stresses balanced literacy in classrooms that includes instructional/shared reading, small-group guided reading, and independent self-selected reading. Writing and language skills such as grammar and spelling are also part of the "balance." These pronouncements from researchers have encouraged elementary schools to purchase leveled books for small-group guided reading, and the authentic literature of trade books for whole group and independent reading. However, the basal reader, a canon from the previous century, continues to be relied upon to support teacher pedagogy and student learning in many schools throughout the country.

To remain abreast of current school practice, this study investigated elementary teachers' implementation of a new basal reading program in six schools in an affluent northeastern school district. The purpose of this study was to determine teachers' perceptions of the helpfulness of a basal reading program manual (Bacharach & Alexander, 1986), their attitudes toward basal readers as a reading method (Cloud-Silva & Sadoski, 1987), and to systematically examine teachers' actual use of these materials (Bacharach & Alexander, 1986 and Cloud-Silva & Sadoski, 2001). Overarching questions were developed based on those used by Bacharach and Alexander's (1986) investigation of what teachers think of basal readers and how they use them.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BASAL IN THE UNITED STATES

### Development

Since the 1830's publication of the McGuffey readers, basal reading programs have been a staple of reading instruction in the United States (Dewitz, Jones & Leahy, 2009; Smith, 1986). The term "basal" was originally used to describe commercially published reading programs rather than specific reading approaches (Hoffman, Sailors & Patterson, 2002).

Basals grew in popularity during the 1950s and 1960s; they were characterized as being leveled for each specific grade and having controlled vocabulary. They were the main instructional materials used in American elementary classrooms during that time. Basals changed somewhat during the 1970's when publishers focused less on controlling vocabulary and more on increasing vocabulary exposure (Popp, 1975). In addition, practice books containing skills-based worksheets were a key feature of core reading programs at that time (Dewitz, Jones & Leahy, 2009). By the mid 1980s, basals were losing popularity because they were considered to have a diminished emphasis on meaning. The books were found to be "trivial and boring" by both students and teachers (Goodman & Shannon, 1988). A few decades ago, Tierney (1984) provided a synthesis of research on published instructional reading materials which found that basal series were often considered inferior choices for instructional reading due to either mismatch between readers' abilities and the scripting of instruction for the teacher, or poor quality of the stories contained in the basals. Tierney argued that determining text quality "must be done in context" (p. 289).

Expanded criteria for the development of core reading programs were hallmarks of the 1990s. Some decisions based on

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the new criteria were: (1) replace diluted excerpts from quality literature with excerpts that retain the integrity of the author's word choices and story line; (2) encourage additional instructional and independent reading by recommending author study and theme-related books connected to the basal selection or theme; (3) broaden the resources offered with the core materials to include a range of leveled readers; and (4) expand instructional suggestions for writing connected to the core program's selection and provide for several writing options in response to literature. Advocates for literature-based approaches to reading instruction influenced both the quality of literature and the quality of design for basal readers (McGee, 1992; Wepner & Feeley, 1993).

At the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Fawson and Reutzel (2000) posited that the positive features of basal anthologies were that they provide variety and quantity of both narrative and informational pieces. In the early 2000s basal reading programs were rebranded as 'core reading programs' (Dewitz & Jones, 2013 p. 392). A 2007 survey by the Education Market Research found that the majority of American schools are using these programs. In particular, 75% of the schools and teachers sampled either follow the basal with fidelity or sample, picking and choosing from its many components. While the use of basal reader anthologies remains controversial, it is interesting to note that the majority of elementary schools continue to use them.

### Current Trends

In 1993, Canney reported that only 20% of teachers were using only trade books for instructional reading. Children's literature found itself in a prominent place in elementary schools throughout the 90s; the assumption was that the use of literature would lead to more thoughtful and engaged readers who would develop higher level literacy skills (Johnston, Allington, Guice & Brooks, (1998). At the turn of the century, when guided reading (small group needs-based reading instruction) became a widely accepted practice in elementary classrooms, researchers found that there were "missing pieces" within basal anthologies to support guided reading (Fawson & Reutzel, 2000, p. 84). According to these researchers, two major omissions were how to adapt basals for guided reading instruction and lack of leveling for each selection with the anthologies. It seems that publishers heeded this admonishment. Recent publications of basals have extended core reading materials to include leveled guided reading books and other visual and virtual materials (Dewitz, Jones, & Leahy, 2009; Dewitz, Leahy, Jones, & Sullivan, 2010).

### METHOD

The study began with a survey, and was followed by teacher observations and interviews. This methodology provides informative, complete, balanced and useful data (Onwuegubuzie & Mallette, 2011) because data sources are triangulated and these sources also contribute rich detail and the lived experience of the teacher participants. Questions guiding the study are: (1) What are teachers' perceptions of the helpfulness of a basal reading program manual? (2) What are teacher's attitudes toward basal readers as a reading method? and (3) How do teachers use the basal reader materials? This study is beneficial because it explores teacher's implementation of a new program and provides valuable information and insight to others in similar positions. Although

many schools utilize materials such as those investigated in this study, limited research exists on this topic.

### Publisher's Research Perspective

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH) publishers describe their 2011 *Journeys* program as a "core reading program designed to meet the diverse needs of all students" (p. 2). In the 73 page document detailing their research-based approach, HMH states that the design of the basal's activities and strategies are grounded in research on best practices. The document identifies six specific instructional strands: building vocabulary, supporting comprehension, using effective instructional approaches, teaching with effective texts, connecting writing and reading, and meeting all students' needs through differentiation and strategic intervention.

Vocabulary knowledge is built with explicit teaching, reinforcement and multiple exposures. HMH states that vocabulary instruction should "allow students to engage in activities that lead them to consider the word's meaning, relate that meaning to information stored in memory, and work with the word in creative ways" (p. 5). The HMH document emphasizes two features of vocabulary instruction: making connections and morphological instruction.

HMH acknowledges that most elementary students "benefit from instruction in reading comprehension processes and strategies" (p. 11). Texts of varied genres and increasing complexity are included in the *Journeys* program. HMH supports comprehension by guiding teachers to connect to students' background knowledge, aid students to respond critically, and provide students with decoding and fluency practice activities.

The third strand, using effective instructional approaches, incorporates eight of the approaches identified by the RAND Study Group (Snow, 2002): scaffolding, graphic organizers, predictable routines, collaborative learning, whole-group and small-group instruction, varied forms of communication, and engagement and motivation. In order to support children as developing readers and writers, HMH presents ideas "visually to support students' connections" (p. 22).

Teaching with effective texts (fourth strand) provides narrative and information texts about engaging topics and at "an appropriate instructional level" (p. 35). The three features of this strand are leveled texts, varied genres, and engaging topics and themes.

HMH's fifth strand is connecting writing and reading. Students respond to reading in relevant and meaningful ways. The variety of genres experienced by reading effective texts is also experienced with the range of writing genres. Grammar instruction, writing for a purpose, and writing in varied genres are chief features of this strand.

The sixth HMH strand regards effective teachers who capably provide differentiated instruction and strategic intervention in their classrooms. The recipients who most need these types of instruction, struggling readers and ELL students, are the focus of this strand. Proficient readers are also considered.

### Selection of Core Reading Materials

Prior to implementing the HMH program, participating teachers in this study self-selected materials for reading instruction. While teachers generally favored this approach, classroom observations by school principals and district administrators identified inconsistencies of what was being taught, not only across district schools, but also between teachers in the same grade levels within the same school. Therefore, administrators decided to implement a

systemic approach to delivering skill and strategy instruction across the grades.

The selection process for reading/language arts texts is both complex and multidimensional. The research on the selection process schools use when adopting these textbooks has been sparse. Dole and Osborn (1997) identified four "inside influences" a committee might encounter: strong/weak evaluation criteria; sufficient time for evaluation; experience/inexperience of teachers on the committee; the amount of training committee members received on evaluating basal anthologies. The selection process for the district's elementary schools discussed in this article was initiated by the district administrator in charge of elementary curriculum. The selection process is most often conducted by a committee of stakeholders from within the school or district (Dewitz, Leahy, Jones & Sullivan, 2010). Membership on this committee followed a similar protocol and consisted of representative teachers from each of the district's seven elementary schools and across grades. There were 19 general education teachers as well as 15 teachers from other positions within the elementary schools (4 special education teachers, 1 ELL teacher, and 10 literacy specialists). There were also six parents invited to participate on the committee. An elementary principal was the only other administrator on the committee and was present for each committee meeting. Each of the six elementary principals attended the final meeting when the decision to adopt one program was made.

According to the committee's facilitator, the teachers on the committee had a range of teaching experience from three to 20+ years. The facilitator provided professional development on evaluating basal programs before the teachers actually evaluated publishers' programs. The basis for the professional development was the text *The Essential Guide to Selecting and Using Core Reading Programs* (Dewitz, Leahy, Jones, & Sullivan, 2010).

The committee opted not to have classroom teachers pilot any of the reviewed core reading programs because of imminent budget decisions and time constraints due to nearing the end of the school year. Therefore, the majority of the districts' teachers did not preview the materials. Using the new core program as key instructional materials was their introduction to the format of the Teacher Edition and the many ancillary materials provided as essential to the core program.

### Participants

All first through fifth grade teachers in six schools in an affluent northeastern suburban district (n=150) were surveyed. Teachers have been in the field for varying amounts of time and sixty six percent were teaching for fifteen years or less. Of the 101 participating teachers 20.5% have taught in the same school for sixteen years or more, 36% of these teachers have taught their current grade level between one and five years, 27% between six and ten years, 21% between eleven and fifteen years, and 17% of these teachers have taught for sixteen or more years at the same grade level. Of the teachers who completed the survey, 92% have earned a Master's degree or higher.

From the large pool of elementary teachers who took the survey, volunteers came forward after principals from two of the elementary schools requested teachers to participate in observations and interviews. Eleven teachers from the two schools agreed to participate. One researcher observed and interviewed five teachers in Elementary School A and the other observed and interviewed six

teachers in Elementary School B. Typically, interviews took place on the same day the observations were held for the convenience of both the classroom teachers and the researchers.

### Instrumentation

Three basic instruments including a survey, classroom observations and teacher interviews were used to corroborate information on teachers' use and perceptions of these materials. The survey consisted of thirty-seven Likert scale typed forced choice items and six demographic comment questions were developed and administered electronically through Zoomerang (see Appendix B). These questions were formulated to explore teachers' perceptions (TP), fidelity of implementation (IM), professional development needs (PD), and other issues or teacher concerns in relation to the core-reading program (I/C). Numerical scales from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) were used. This scale provided a useful and relatively uncomplicated method of obtaining data on people's attitudes (Baumann & Bason, 2004). The survey took approximately fifteen minutes to complete. An observation protocol form was developed by the researchers (see Appendix C) to record notes in the field (Cresswell, 1998). This protocol includes space for both descriptive and reflective notes.

Interview questions were developed based on Bacharach and Alexander's (1986) teacher survey. These questions were formulated to explore teachers' perceptions (TP), fidelity of implementation (IM), professional development needs (PD), and other issues or teacher concerns in relation to the core-reading program (I/C). Interview questions were reviewed and coded according to the categories above. Questions outside of this scope were removed, leaving a total of twelve questions (see Appendix A).

### Procedures

The survey was administered to all elementary teachers (n=150) electronically using Zoomerang (see Appendix B). Participation in the survey and subsequent interviews and observations was solicited through e-mails and mention of the study at building faculty meetings. District leaders, to avoid coercion in recruiting, were careful to word their requests to reflect teachers' desires to take part in this investigation versus being required to participate. No training was administered to district leaders or principals for recruiting participants. 101 teachers completed the survey (n=101).

During a four-month period following the completion of the teacher survey, teacher volunteers from two of the five elementary schools were recruited by school principals for classroom observations (n=16) and interviews (n=11). Building principals were careful to acknowledge that participation was voluntary and not participating would not reflect negatively on the teachers. Teachers agreeing to participate in observations and interviews were free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. All teachers, before participating in observations and interviews signed the informed consent form. Informed consent forms were explained to participating teachers and distributed by the researcher once on-site.

Thirty-minute classroom observations (n=16) were conducted while the teacher was using the Journey's curriculum materials. The observations were conducted by the researchers and with the assistance of one undergraduate research assistant. Data from



observations was recorded on a prepared observation protocol form (see Appendix C).

Classroom observations were followed by teacher interviews (see Appendix A). Eleven teachers were interviewed by one of the two researchers after each observation. Teachers were asked twelve questions, loosely based on Bacharach and Alexander's 1986 study, focusing on teachers' perceptions of the basal reading program. Interviews were conducted either in the teacher's classroom or in the school library. Interviewees were provided with a copy of the questions prior to the observations and interviews being conducted. Interviews lasted no longer than thirty minutes. Some interviewees had jotted notes to use during their response, but most did not. The researchers recorded teacher responses manually either with pen and paper or on the laptop computer on the interview protocol form.

### Analysis of Data

When all data were collected, survey results were coded and sorted along with teacher interview data by the primary researchers. To provide corroborative information on teachers' use of the basal reading program classroom observation data were analyzed as well to evaluate the consistency of responses. Specifically, teacher interviews sought to identify teachers' perceptions (TP), fidelity of implementation (IM), professional development needs (PD), and other issues or teacher concerns in relation to the core-reading program (I/C) were the categories. Teacher interview data were first sorted by school and then responses to each question were consolidated. Interview questions 1-7 and 9 investigated teachers' perceptions, question 8 explored program implementation, questions 10 and 11 explored teachers' concerns and issues with the program, and question 12 focused on teachers' view of accompanying professional development. This data were then further sorted (see Appendix D) to quantify teacher responses and at the same time support with teacher comments. From this analysis, teacher perceptions were revealed.

## RESULTS

### Teachers' Perceptions (TP)

Analysis of the survey, interview, and observation data revealed teachers' perceptions of the core reading program as favorable. In particular, 100% of the teachers reported being "happy" with the program and 70% agreed that the selection process served the needs of the elementary teachers. Participating teachers appreciated the purposeful integration of reading and writing in each lesson, and found the ancillary materials helpful. Teachers made very favorable comments about two specific ancillary materials including the leveled guided reading books (90%) and vocabulary cards (80%). The guided reading books were a chief source of small group instruction; the two-sided vocabulary cards provide clear text-picture match to introduce focused vocabulary words for each lesson (see Figure 1). The reverse side of each card



FIGURE 1. HMH Vocabulary Cards

had activities based on the newly introduced words. Teachers used these cards in a variety of ways for independent work, partnered collaborative work, and guided review in small groups.

Most of the teachers (90%) expressed confidence in their abilities to provide students with an appropriate developmental curriculum as a result of using the newly adopted core reading program. One teacher stated "every reader in my class has improved this year." Coincidentally, 90% also reported that most of their instructional planning is based on the suggestions found in the teacher's edition. Although half of the interviewed teachers felt that they had "very little" freedom to make decisions concerning the reading instruction in their classrooms, 40% responded that they have "a lot" of freedom.

Interview data revealed that participating teachers found that the various components of HMH's core reading program addressed the needs and skill development of their students. Three specifically mentioned skills were grammar, phonics, and writing. However, while teachers reported that the students were learning skills they expressed concern that the program "does not meet the needs of kids in supporting their love for literature. Instead the program is really about learning skills". Teachers commented that many of the skills were "easy" for high achieving students, that the program lacked on level reading material for this population, and that they overwhelmingly expressed concern for these above level readers. Teachers reported that they located literature and chapter

books that matched the theme from the core reading program to address this discrepancy and supplement materials for this high achieving group.

Teachers shared their concerns about the program with the most common response being there was not enough time to do everything scripted in the program. When asked if they had anything else they wished to discuss, six of the interviewees offered further comments. Four of the comments were extremely positive as they focused on the high amount of student interest in the new program and the benefits of the program to their own instructional practices. Two comments were based on teachers' perceptions of a lack of instructional creativity due to following the suggestions in the program.

#### *Implementation: IM*

Of the participating teachers surveyed, 93% of them reported implementing the program faithfully and 80% of those interviewed supported this statement. Initially a concern teachers had was that the HMH program did not have the children reading novels. However, during the first year of program implementation, teachers had positive experiences using the guided reading books included in the program because these texts were "short enough to read and complete". While implementing the program faithfully, teachers also reported that they "do not read from the manual". As the year progressed, teachers began to incorporate their "own things". In

particular, teachers identified the natural connection between social studies and science curriculum topics and HMH materials and expressed an inclination to support this holistic approach. Overall, 85% of the respondents found they were able to integrate their individual style of lesson planning into the program. Teachers reported emphasizing some aspects of the program at times more than others, depending on the needs of the particular group. For example teachers increased the complexity of center activities for one group and provided support to accomplish multidimensional steps to another, although these elements were not explicitly included in the program. 83% of the teachers surveyed agreed that the teacher edition is user friendly and 100% strongly agreed that the "Focus Wall page for each lesson gives a clear overview of the lesson components of each day's lesson" (see Figure 2). However, 60% of the 101 teachers' surveyed report that they struggle to address the components of each day's language arts lesson due to time constraints. Teachers noted the need for more flexibility in timing, including that "it is too rushed" and "it can feel like we are on gerbil exercise wheel". They also would prefer, "more than one week for each unit."

#### *Professional Development: PD*

Results showed that 89% of the participating teachers identified that the district provided sufficient professional development during the first year implementation. This included "chat and chew" sessions where teachers received as needed support from the districts' Director of Literacy as well as more formal whole group training. That being said, most teachers interviewed identified Think Central, the online component of the HMH program, as an area/topic requiring further exploration and attention. Teachers shared that they did receive training on the on-line component before they were required to use HMH, but felt that they needed additional training now that they have had some experience using the program. Teachers' benefited from the initial HMH training, however after the first year of implementation they realized that additional training was needed. Teachers expressed confusion regarding how to implement the HMH program in its entirety when other content area programs are used. For example, teachers discussed difficulties that arose when they tried to juxtapose the writing program used in this district with the HMH program and integrate both concurrently. During interviews teachers consistently expressed the need for the time and opportunity to collaborate and share ideas with their grade level teams about existing HMH components and experiences. Teachers are eager to learn from their grade level partners and prefer this as the first step, followed by professional development to address program components.

#### *Concerns and Issues: CI*

Participating teachers were generally pleased with student performance and first year implementation, but they have several concerns and issues with the HMH program. Specifically, 95% of the teachers surveyed were concerned that the program left

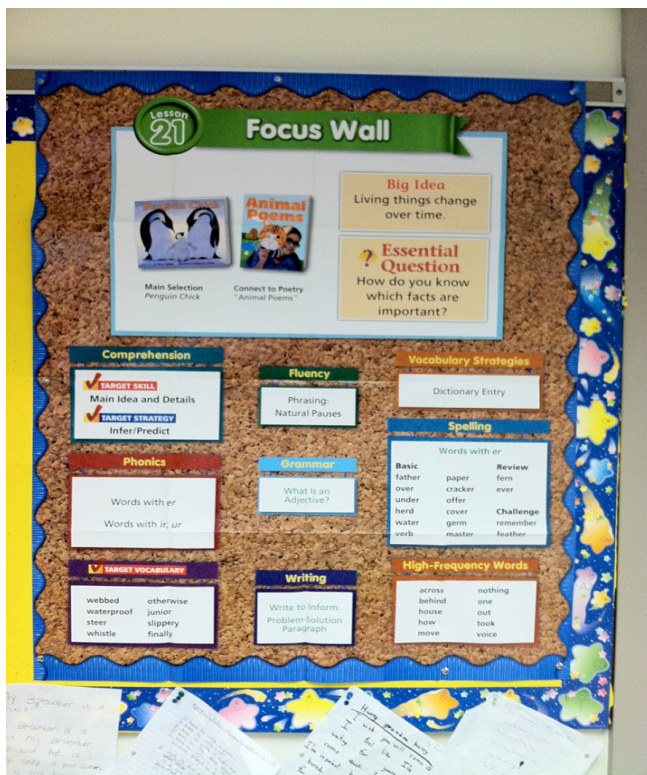


FIGURE 2. HMH Focus Wall.

insufficient time to plan lessons with their grade level partners. As indicated above, teachers believed common planning time to collaboratively work through the program would benefit their overall program implementation. Participants also were concerned that the program might not meet the needs of the gifted and struggling readers. Specifically, 87% identified that the program failed to meet the needs of the gifted students, noting in particular that the number of guided reading books for this group was insufficient. At the same time 48% of participants were concerned about the meeting the needs of the struggling readers. Participants were cognizant that success with this core reading program was contingent upon students' requisite literacy skills. Children from this upper socio economic, suburban district were prepared to meet program expectations. However, without these requisite literacy skills and background knowledge, teachers identified that implementing this program could be problematic.

## DISCUSSION

The decision to have elementary teachers transition from self-selecting their materials for reading instruction to using the core materials of a published program was initiated by the administration of the participating school district described in this study. District administrators found that inconsistency of what was being taught, not only across district schools, but also between teachers in the same grade levels within the same school. Therefore, administrators decided to implement a systemic approach to delivering skill and strategy instruction across the grades. The district included representative elementary teachers in the selection process as part of a committee and then provided professional development to all elementary teachers who eventually were responsible for using the materials once the selection was made.

The perceptions of teachers after a full year of implementing the HMH core reading program were worthy of investigation to determine the advantages and short-comings of using the program from the views of the practitioners. As noted earlier, the generalized perception of the elementary teachers was that the HMH core reading materials provided "benefits to our instructional program." Integration of reading and writing, guided reading materials and suggestions, and developmental appropriateness of the HMH program were the major benefits reported by teachers in this study. Teachers across the elementary grades found that the HMH program provided "developmentally appropriate curriculum" and adequate skill development for the children whom they taught.

However, some teachers felt that the use of the basal materials inhibited "instructional creativity." Teachers who had previously used picture books or chapter books exclusively for instruction explained that they supplemented the HMH materials with children's literature. They reported choosing books that "matched the theme" of the HMH lessons they taught. Teachers were

especially vocal about this issue when they felt the HMH lessons were easy for their high achieving students. An examination of HMH's sixth strand of their program components advocates challenging advanced learners with "multiple learning options" and "engaging tasks." It seems that the publisher would endorse the teachers' decision to use more complex texts for their gifted readers in order to meet teaching and learning goals. An endorsement for adjusting instruction can be found in the current research (Dewitz & Jones, 2013; Dole & Osborn, 1997; Fawson & Reutzel, 2000) which purports that only effective teachers can differentiate instruction based on careful observation and other informal data sources. Publishers' suggestions are broad-based and not meant to address specific needs of individual students.

Perceptions of losing their ability to include full pieces of children's literature or to develop their own themes may have been due to teachers' resistance to the initial change of materials and the ensuing planning and implementation of new themes and lessons. Also, because this study occurred during the first year of HMH implementation, some teachers may have followed the HMH scripted suggestions with more fidelity than they would if they had had more time to gain familiarity with the program. With additional time, teachers may have found it necessary to either follow or eliminate some of the publisher's suggestions based on their assessment of both the quality and appropriateness of particular suggestions for their students' needs. Dewitz and Jones (2013) urge teachers to modify and augment instructional suggestions encountered in basal programs.

First year implementation of the HMH core reading materials seemed to be an easy transition for most of the elementary teachers; they reported the ease of integrating their "own style of lesson planning" even though they had the HMH materials as a guide. A difficult area of transition for the elementary teachers was the constraint of time: teachers felt they were unable to "do all" suggestions provided by the publisher. We propose that time constraint is not a new issue for teachers, especially during the reading/language arts instructional block. Having more time to teach, and more time for students' to practice their reading strategies and skills, is on the wish list of all effective elementary teachers.

Professional development provided by the participating district's language arts administrator during the first year was deemed sufficient by approximately 90% of the elementary teachers. They found this administrator to be knowledgeable, resourceful, and accessible. However, all teachers expressed the need for on-going professional development related to *Think Central*, the on-line component of HMH. Teachers stated that HMH consultants trained them on *Think Central* before they were required to teach using the HMH core materials, and expressed their frustration about wanting continued assistance with *Think Central* during their transition year. Teachers and administrators need to communicate about this issue and create an action plan so that teachers get the support they need for this valuable component of the HMH program.



Teachers in this study raised two viable concerns/issues about their transition to using a core reading program. First, teachers voiced concern about insufficient time to co-plan as grade level teams. Collaboration and problem solving are tools for fostering efficient and effective instruction. Since all teachers were unfamiliar with the new materials and were learning on the job, it may have been helpful for the district to provide chunks of time for teachers to meet in their grade level teams to engage in planning discussions that enabled them to do more than surface planning with their colleagues. Second, as they transitioned from choosing their own materials to using a published program, teachers were concerned about their gifted students who could have benefited from challenges they felt were lacking in the HMH suggestions. Collaboration within grade level teams, or even school-wide discussions about meeting the needs of gifted students could have helped alleviate or diminish this issue. Teachers who choose quality children's literature that challenged the gifted students would have been affirmed in doing so.

Overall, the results of this study revealed that teachers perceived a successful year of teaching and learning as they transitioned to using HMH. As these teachers gain familiarity with the new core reading materials, they depend on continued support to affirm their decisions and aid their lesson planning, grouping structures, and assessments of students. It would be helpful if the selection committee which convened before the adoption of HMH, or another representative committee, would meet to review the survey administered in this study and assess any steps the district might take to provide both the on-going and needs-based professional development to support teachers during the initial years of this instructional transition. Additionally, the committee should consider how to best assist teachers with the concerns/issues relayed within this study.

## CONCLUSION

Teachers in this study hold favorable perceptions regarding the core reading program adopted by their district. Effective components identified by the teachers include HMH's integration of reading and writing in each lesson, and ancillary materials, especially the leveled guided reading books and vocabulary cards. Additionally the general perception of teachers articulated during the interviews was that the program "provides teachers with a backbone to go from so we have many options for our students." Teachers in this study expressed confidence in their ability to provide students with an appropriate developmental curriculum as a result of using the core reading program. The blend of whole class and small group instruction seemed to contribute to teachers' confidence levels.

Teachers' main concerns were not having adequate time to complete all aspects of the program, in addition to not having adequate instructional and reading materials for advanced readers. These were consistent concerns across schools and grade levels.

Teachers addressed these issues by "picking and choosing" which activities to do and also providing supplemental reading that related to the basal's content for their more advanced readers. The high SES of students in the participating schools was a strong factor in the number of advanced/above grade level readers across grades. Upper elementary grades supplanted both instructional and independent reading.

*See full size appendices on next page.*





## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Interview Questions

1. Do you think the textbook selection process in the district served the needs of elementary teachers? Why or why not?
2. Are you happy with the core reading program? Why?
3. How would you describe the instructional suggestions provided in the teacher's edition?
  - (a) Consistently thorough and appropriate for the students in my grade level
  - (b) Generally thorough and appropriate for the students in my grade level
  - (c) Generally thorough but not always appropriate for the students in my grade level
  - (d) Thoroughness of suggestions varies from lesson to lesson
  - (e) Additional comment:
4. Which of the ancillary materials that accompany the core reading program have you found to be most helpful? (for example: small books, software, vocabulary cards, etc.)
5. Do you feel confident that you are providing your students with an appropriate developmental reading program?
6. Do the components of the core reading program taught at your grade level address the needs and skill development of your students?
  - (a) If so, which components?
  - (b) If not, how do you supplement instruction? What do you see as not being addressed?
7. Which of the following most influences your use of the core reading program?
  - (a) Directives and decisions made by district administration
  - (b) Directives and decisions made by the school campus (principal and fellow teachers)
  - (c) Personal decisions
8. To what extent do you base your planning on the suggestions/script provided in the teacher's edition of the core reading program?
  - (a) Complete planning is based on TE suggestions/script
  - (b) Most planning is based on TE suggestions/script
  - (c) Some but not all of the planning is based on TE suggestions/script
  - (d) None of the planning is based on TE suggestions/script
9. How much freedom do you have to make decisions concerning the reading instruction in your classroom?
10. What professional development needs do you feel you still have now that you've used the core reading materials for several months?
11. What concerns do you have at this time about the use of the core reading materials?
12. Is there anything you'd like to share about your experiences with the core reading materials that we have not yet discussed?

**Appendix B**

## Core Materials Survey

## Part 1: Core Materials Survey

Read each statement and rate your level of agreement with the statement from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). The numbers represent the following gradation of agreement:

1 = Strongly Disagree (SD); 2 = Disagree (D); 3 = Minimal Agreement (MA); 4 = Agree (A); 5 = Strongly Agree (SA).

Thank you for your participation!

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	SD	D	MA	A	SA
1. I was pleased when I learned the school district was considering using a basal as core instructional material.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I feel the curriculum committee chose a basal that meets the teaching and learning needs of all.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The teachers-edition (TE) is user-friendly.	1	2	3	4	5
4. The introduction and subsequent review of reading strategies in the basal is a sufficient continuum.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The "chat and chew" sessions with the Reading/Language Arts Coordinator were helpful <u>during</u> the first year implementation of the basal.	1	2	3	4	5
6. The assessment components provided in the HMH basal program provide me with adequate and accurate information about students' reading skills, adjusting grouping, pacing and other features necessary to meet the needs of all students in my class.	1	2	3	4	5
7. The HMH basal program promotes independent reading in the classroom and makes good suggestions for doing so.	1	2	3	4	5
8. The basal program promotes the reading of full stories/books that are excerpted in the program and makes good suggestions for doing so.	1	2	3	4	5
9. My individual style of lesson planning is easily integrated into the lesson format of the basal.	1	2	3	4	5
10. There is purposeful integration of reading/writing in each basal lesson.	1	2	3	4	5
11. The district provided sufficient professional development <u>during</u> the first year of basal implementation.	1	2	3	4	5
12. The basal provides a good balance of narrative and informational reading and writing.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I believe that parents were well-informed about the decision to implement the basal as part of core instruction.	1	2	3	4	5

14. I believe that the content of the stories/articles <u>and</u> the response activities meet the needs of the students in the grade I teach.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I have sufficient supplemental materials to use if/when I need them.	1	2	3	4	5
16. There is enough time in the language arts block to adequately address the components of each day's lesson (as suggested by the publisher).	1	2	3	4	5
17. HMH provides/suggests adequate opportunities to instruct students in both large and small group structures.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I needed time this year to plan lessons with my grade level partners.	1	2	3	4	5
19. The suggested "weekly plan" is both comprehensive and doable.	1	2	3	4	5
20. The HMH Teacher Read Aloud provides sufficient modeling by the teacher and sufficient target skills for students' listening comprehension.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Target vocabulary is well-chosen and aids students' comprehension.	1	2	3	4	5
22. The "essential question" feature helps to focus teaching and learning.	1	2	3	4	5
23. I use the "language arts" features (phonics, grammar, writing) just as provided by HMH.	1	2	3	4	5
24. I generally adapt the use of the "language arts" features (phonics, grammar, writing) for particular students or particular situations.	1	2	3	4	5
25. I have the students use the Practice Book regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
26. The "Connect and Extend" feature of each lesson provides useful teaching tips.	1	2	3	4	5
27. The "Intervention" section of the TE provides useful re-teaching activities for use with struggling readers.	1	2	3	4	5
28. The "Focus Wall" page for each lesson gives me a clear overview of lesson components and especially the skills and strategies for which I should focus.	1	2	3	4	5
29. I am concerned about meeting the needs of gifted students with the HMH materials.	1	2	3	4	5
30. The opportunity to include the reading of trade books as part of instructional reading is evident in my classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
31. I follow the Teacher's Edition as closely as possible.	1	2	3	4	5
32. I am concerned about meeting the needs of struggling readers with the HMH materials.	1	2	3	4	5
33. There are some HMH lessons that I find lack the goals I'd like my students to achieve.	1	2	3	4	5



34. The writing instruction suggested by HMH generates a sufficient amount and variety of writing for students at my grade level.	1	2	3	4	5
35. I do as much small group instruction now with the basal as I did before the HMH materials were implemented.	1	2	3	4	5
36. I believe that my teaching methods have improved since I started using the HMH materials.	1	2	3	4	5
37. Students are receiving a balanced literacy program.	1	2	3	4	5

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## Part 2: Demographic information

### Schools:

1= Cynwyd Elementary; 2= Gladwyne Elementary; 3= Merion Elementary; 4= Penn Valley Elementary; 5= Penn Wynne Elementary

1. Where do you teach?	1	2	2	4	5
2. Circle the number of the grade you teach. (Kindergarten teachers do not respond)	1	2	3	4	5

### Experience

1= 1-5 years; 2= 6-10 years; 3=11-15 years; 4= 16-20; 5=21+

1. How many years have you been an educator?	1	2	3	4	5
2. How many years have you taught in this school?	1	2	3	4	5
3. How many years have you taught this grade level?	1	2	3	4	5

### Degree

1= Bachelors; 2= Bachelors + 15; 3= Masters; 4= Masters + 15; 5= Post Graduate

1. What is your level of education?	1	2	3	4	5
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**Appendix C**  
 Classroom Observation Form

Classroom Observation of \_\_\_\_ in Grade \_\_\_\_ Observer: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Time: Start: \_\_\_\_\_ End: \_\_\_\_\_ TE related pages/section: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other literacy materials used (if any): \_\_\_\_\_  
 This observed lesson was: ( ) a new lesson; ( ) an on-going part of a lesson  
 Strategy or skill taught: \_\_\_\_\_

Instructional Event	Notes

**What is an instructional event?**

An instructional event is any literacy-related activity and/or interaction initiated by the teacher that is engaged in by the students some time during the lesson. Demonstrating/explaining a strategy or skill (defining, modeling, posting a chart or graphic organizer for Ss' to visualize the explanation), posing questions, responding to questions, setting a task for students: jotting, pair-share, word work, drawing/writing, independent reading, retelling, enactment, etc.

**Appendix D**

## Analysis of Interview Responses

Question	School A (PV)	School B (M)	Comments
1 Selection meet needs of Ts?	4/5 (80%)	3/5 (60%)	70% agreed that selection process served the needs of elem. Ts  - - - - - 1 (A) I was not involved 1 (B) I was not included 2 (B) T was not response specific; discussed needs of students rather than teachers
2 Happy w/ program?	100 % Yes	100% Yes	Consider using M-2's comments as a quote in the article
3. Instructional suggestions in TE?	1/5 "consistently" thorough & appropriate 2 = generally 2 = thoroughness of suggestions varies from lesson to lesson	5/5 "generally" thorough	Lots of variation of responses – concern about "levels" suggested by HMH as being appropriate for "above" level readers as well as "below" level readers  60% = "generally thorough and appropriate for students in my grade level"
4 ancillary materials most helpful?	5/5 "small" books; vocab cards; PV-5 "Think Central is a nightmare because it is difficult to navigate."	4/5 "small" books; M-4 "Online reading is helpful" (Think Central)	9/10 mention guided reading books 8/10 vocab cards  See specific comments – may want to use a quote
Confident – appropriate developmental reading program?	4/5 yes 1/5 – no; haven't used full year yet	5/5 yes	90% - yes – confident
6 Address needs and skill devel of Ss?	5/5 yes  SPECIFICALLY MENTION Grammar, phonics, and writing	5/5 – yes but 4 of them say the skills are "easy" for high achieving Ss	M-1 "I supplement with novels."
7 Influences your use of program?	2/5 directives from admins 1/5 directives made by the school campus 2/5 personal decisions	5/5 Directives & decisions made by district administration	70% - "Directives and decisions made by district administration."
8 Your planning ?	NOT ON FORM	4/5 = MOST planning is based on TE suggestions/script 1/5 = Complete planning based on TE	PV responses are NOT ON FORM

9 Freedom to make decisions?	4/5 = "a lot" 1/5 "none"	5/5 "very little"	60% little or no freedom to make their own decisions concerning the reading instruction in their classrooms
10 What PD do you feel you still need?	2/5 on-line (Think Central) 2/5 don't want 1/5 spelling and writing pieces	3/5 on "Think Central" 1/5 How to use all components 1/5 collaborate w/ partners	50% on "Think Central"
11 Concerns?	All 5 responses are different  1 = "moves too fast" 2 = phonics 3 = 6 guided rdg books are not enough 4 = no concerns 5 = It's so huge; trying to weed through it	3/5 = not enough time; These responses are different from those of PV Ts) 2 = highly structured 5 = spelling not hard enough; need to use data to inform instruc	50% = not enough time – including 1 and 5 from PV. 20% - specific components (phonics; spelling)
12 Anything else?	3/5 = no 1 = "words to know" are supposed to be high-frequency words but really vocab words; missing creativity; worksheet driven 2 = examples given in HMH but teacher can't follow up – has to follow script (ex = baseball example; would like to discuss baseball w/ ss as "many are baseball fans."	1/5 = no 4 other comments are all POSITIVE: 1 = Love the guided reading books 2 = a lot of student interest 3 = This really helps my rdg instruction 4 = happy we have a new program	40% = nothing else to discuss



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